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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND IPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [KPAL](#) [PTER](#) [JO](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: HABASH DEATH DRAWS JORDAN'S GAZE BRIEFLY; SOME SEE
MEANING IN HIS RETIREMENT TO AMMAN

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine founder George Habash, whose calls for the overthrow of the Hashemites and brazen, terrorist airline hijackings here in 1970 ran afoul of the Jordanian Government and precipitated the crackdown on Palestinian groups known as Black September, died of a heart attack in Amman on January 26. His passing was greeted with a flash of press attention, a few nostalgic media commentaries, and a funeral marked by pan-Arabist slogans that sounded anachronistic compared with the Islamically-colored pronouncements of those who stand in for an opposition today.

¶2. (C) Unsurprisingly, there was no evident comment or sense of loss from official Jordan (in contrast to the Palestinian Authority's declaring three days of mourning and lowering flags to half mast), though some local parliamentarians were reported to have been in his January 28 funeral procession. At his funeral, Habash - who went by the nom de guerre "al-Hakim," meaning doctor or "the wise one" - was extolled as a leader and a founding member of the revolutionary school of Palestinian resistance. A member of the PFLP's political bureau informed the crowd that Habash's last words to him were that the breaking of borders between Arab countries - as had just taken place quite literally on the Gaza-Egypt frontier - should be repeated throughout "the Arab homeland."

¶3. (C) There is little patience for that kind of talk these days in Jordan, and Habash's death was more a curiosity than a focus for our contacts, Palestinian-origin or otherwise. Among our interlocutors, even those who found something to praise in Habash were doubtful of his legacy. Hazem Qashou, Palestinian-origin head of the tiny Al-Resalah political party, called Habash "one of the greatest leaders" of the Palestinian people, but went on to assess his legacy in Jordan in negative tones. "I respect his leadership, but I disagree with his performance," he said. Qashou noted that Black September is still used by East Banker politicians as an excuse to discriminate against Palestinians in Jordan. "They won't allow us to get over that tinge of disloyalty (see septel). The tribes and the 'interest groups' who are currently in power benefited greatly from Black September." Still, Qashou disagreed with the New York Times' characterization of Habash as a "Palestinian Terrorism Tactician." "Sometimes, you should struggle. It's not part of terrorism. I have the right to scream, I have the right to shout." NOTE: Qashou was silent on Habash's assertion of a right to kill. END NOTE.

Amman: Garden Spot for Reformed Revolutionaries?

¶4. (C) Some of our contacts found meaning in the fact that a figure with such an antagonistic relationship with the Jordanian government would nonetheless choose to (and be

allowed to) spend his waning years in Amman. For instance, Al-Urdun Al-Jadid ("New Jordan") Research Center director Hani Hourani, who once traveled in similar Palestinian leftist circles, gave Jordan some credit. Typically a tireless critic of the GOJ for what he sees as insufficient political reforms, Hourani observed that only in a place as stable as Jordan could someone like Habash "return" and live in peace. Hourani added that it spoke volumes about the general moderation of the regime that Habash's return was allowed despite the PFLP's pretensions to overthrow the monarchy.

15. (C) Nathir Rashid, who was Director of the General Intelligence Department (GID) during Black September, offered a particularly harsh evaluation of the man and the treatment of his death in Jordan. Dismayed at the positive treatment Habash was receiving in the press and society, Rashid called his funeral "filthy," adding, "Habash tried his best to overthrow the government. Some people are against everything unless they are in power. It's shameful." He noted the irony that many ex-militants are now retiring to Amman, which is peaceful and safe in spite of the same militants' past efforts to bring down the regime. Palestinian-origin Raja'i Dajani, who was Interior Minister in the late 1980s and before that one of the founding members of the GID, initially remarked "to hell with him," but noted with a smile that radicals of Habash's ilk "found out late that Jordan wasn't that bad."

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